

## TOOLS FOR REMOTE USERS AT THE "LIBRARY-BY-THE-SEA": THE IMPACT OF THE WEB ON THE FRIDAY HARBOR LIBRARY

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**ABSTRACT:** The University of Washington's Friday Harbor Library is located in a remote marine laboratory facility in Washington's San Juan Islands. While the library is considered part of the large, research-institution sized UW Libraries, there is no librarian in residence for most of the year and the patrons must be assisted remotely from Seattle. This paper addresses specialized web-based tools developed specifically for the faculty and researchers of the UW's Friday Harbor Library and the ways in which these tools have allowed the Friday Harbor Librarian to connect remote users to the collections and resources of the larger institution.

"Two hours by sea from the mainland of the state of Washington lies one of the most remote scientific research libraries in the country. There on the shore of an isolated island sits a pink stuccoed, orange roofed, barracks-sized library" (Murphy 1952). So begins an article from 1952 titled "Library-by-the-Sea" describing University of Washington's Friday Harbor Library written by Lawrence Murphy, UW Oceanography and Fisheries librarian.

While not as distinctively-hued as its predecessor, half a century later the Friday Harbor Library is still serving students, faculty and an international group of researchers at the University of Washington Friday Harbor Laboratories located in the San Juan Islands of Washington.



Fig. 1 – Friday Harbor  
Library, 1952

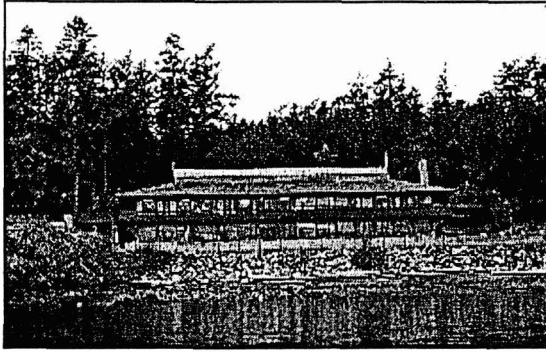


Fig. 2 - Fernald Laboratory Building, home of the Friday Harbor Library, 2003

### History of the Friday Harbor Labs

The UW Friday Harbor Labs have been in existence, in one form or another, since 1904 when Trevor Kincaid (UW professor of zoology and the first Labs' director), T.C. Frye (UW professor of botany and director of the labs 1914-1930) and some adventurous students spent six weeks living in tents and studying the abundant marine life of the San Juan Islands. "No formal class work was offered; everyone collected and classified to suit himself" (Phifer and Phifer 1930).

In 1906, an abandoned fish cannery became the Puget Sound Marine Station. While there was a building, there was, as yet, "no real scientific equipment" of note. In 1909, the cannery was sold and a new campus was built on four acres of donated land. It consisted of a large laboratory, sixty wooden-floored tents, and a combined dining hall-kitchen-social room. "Perhaps the dearest memories of those attending the station during the next 13 years revolve around this great room...students and professors gathered as one large family to eat at the rough 12-foot tables...[and] to study from the books of the gradually increasing library..." (Phifer and Phifer 1930). It was on this campus that the Labs took on a more formal teaching atmosphere, adding classes and increasing the student population to about 70 students each summer.

By 1920, the station had a new name and was in need of more space. Dr. Frye talked the military into donating a 484-acre property on Point Caution, which became the new Puget Sound Biological Station. A special act of Congress ceded the land to the UW in 1922. By 1928 there were six laboratory buildings and 100 wooden-floored tents. The dining hall once again served as the central gathering place and housed the library. Echoing today's budget woes, "because of lack of funds, the growth of the Station Library [was] slow." By 1930 it contained "about 3300 volumes, most of which [were] bound periodicals and separates," (Phifer and Phifer 1930) and in an interesting contrast from today's model, "require[d] the full time of a librarian to care for the library..."

The user community included teachers who came to the Station to improve their biology teaching skills. It was T.C. Frye's "hope to make the place known over the world, as well

as to render it of real value to the schools and coming generations of the Northwest" (Phifer and Phifer 1930). The focus later moved away from training new teachers and more towards teaching students the marine sciences, and conducting professional research. In 1962, a dramatic change to the Labs was the addition of the Fernald Laboratory Building. The building provided the library, for the first time, a space designed for its specific use.

### **Distance Learners or Distant Librarian?**

In 2003, one still has to leave behind the hustle and bustle of Seattle to reach the UW Friday Harbor Laboratories. The trip requires a two-hour drive north of Seattle through the tulip fields of the Skagit Valley to the sleepy seaside town of Anacortes and the Washington State Ferries dock. An hour-long ride on one of the distinctive green and white ferries through the San Juan Archipelago brings you to the town of Friday Harbor on San Juan Island. The Labs are situated about a mile out of town on a 484-acre biological preserve. Deer, rabbits, foxes, wild turkeys and the occasional bald eagle share the Labs' property with students, faculty, staff and independent researchers from all over the world.

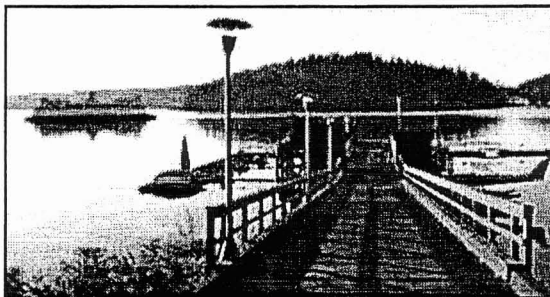


Fig. 3 – *View of the ferry from the Labs.*

As T.C. Frye envisioned, the Labs have become an international biological research station. The number of students has increased steadily, and classes are now taught year-round. In 2002, there were 116 independent investigators at the Labs from all over the United States, as well as from Denmark, Japan, Russia, Great Britain, Israel, Germany and France, among others. In addition to graduate and undergraduate students taking classes at the Labs, there were also 58 student investigators and research assistants. Undergraduate research apprenticeships provide the opportunity for small groups of five to eight students to work on an intensive, full-time research training experience with one or more instructors. Things have come a long way from a few students living in tents and dredging the sea bottom with a small fish scow.

The library has also come a long way from a few volumes in the dining hall. It is still located in the Fernald Lab Building and now houses over 19,000 volumes. Although the library is open year-round and 24 hours per day, the librarian is no longer up at the Labs

full-time. Because of the open access and the lack of a regularly scheduled on-site librarian, the library must be set up for autonomous use.

The Friday Harbor Librarian is based in Seattle at the Natural Sciences Library, in residence at the Labs for a week at the beginning of fall, winter and spring quarters and for several weeks in the summer. The rest of the time the library is managed from Seattle. During the busy summer quarter, the Friday Harbor Library is staffed daily by a librarian. In addition to the Friday Harbor Librarian, other science librarians from the UW Seattle campus help to staff the library on a rotating basis.

Many things have not really changed in the over 50 years since Lawrence Murphy wrote about the "Library by the Sea." However, Murphy could not have foreseen how true his observation that "not all library research is land-bound" (Murphy 1952) would prove to be.

### **Computers Come to Friday Harbor Library**

The first hint of the major changes to affect this idyllic island library came with the installation of an online catalog (Geac) in 1989. Before Geac, the Friday Harbor Library had a traditional card catalog. Once people at the Labs could check the holdings of the whole UW Libraries system easily requests began pouring in for materials from the Seattle campus libraries. Now, with the help of two student assistants, hundreds of items are sent up to the Labs each year.

The next major change came with the installation of Ethernet, allowing the library to replace the online catalog terminal with a computer workstation connected to the UWIN (University of Washington Information Navigator) system. UWIN provided access to the catalog, journal indexes, and the Internet. By 1998, these innovations seemed antiquated and were becoming obsolete. The connection to the UW campus was by 56K modem and seemed incredibly slow. The hardware and the software were outdated.

### **The 'net Reels in Remote Users**

The true revolution came in 1999 with the installation of a T-1 line. This not only boosted the computing speed, but allowed direct network connection to all of the UW Libraries' considerable online resources. If we had thought the advent of the online catalog opened up a whole new world of research possibilities, the impact of the web was to open a whole new universe. In conjunction with the development of the UW Libraries Gateway came the first set of Friday Harbor Library web pages, and a series of online products designed specifically for the Labs.

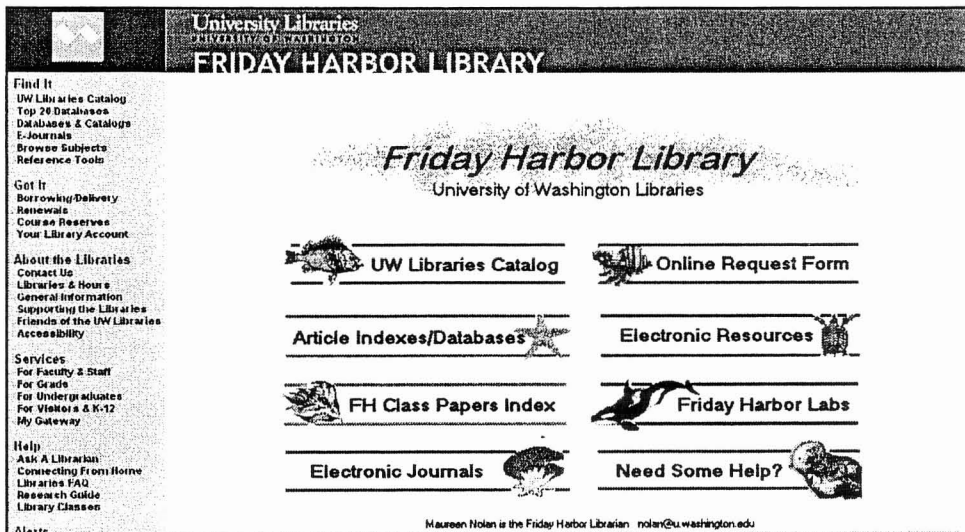


Fig. 4 – Friday Harbor Library Home Page

The first custom tool was an online request form for materials from the Seattle Campus. Because the form is online, it is easy to cut and paste from the UW catalog and article databases. This makes it a seamless process to search for and request materials.


Fig. 5 – Friday Harbor Library Online Request Form


The next change was a small one with a large impact. Since the librarian is not in residence at the Labs, we needed to provide convenient avenues for reference help. First we added a prominent link to the librarian's e-mail from the library's home page. With


the advent of online chat reference at the University of Washington Libraries, we've moved to a more inclusive "help" page.


**University Libraries** **Friday Harbor Library**

### Resources for Getting Help

 **Email**  
Email Maureen Nolan, the Friday Harbor Librarian, at [nolan@u.washington.edu](mailto:nolan@u.washington.edu)

 **Q&A Live**  
**Connect** to real-time, online reference service with a librarian.  
Available Monday through Thursday 7am to 5pm, Fridays 7am to 5pm, except holidays

 **Phone**  
Friday Harbor Library: (206) 616-0759  
or Maureen Nolan in Seattle: (206) 685-2126

 **Mail**  
Friday Harbor Library  
University of Washington Libraries  
Box 362900  
Seattle, WA 98195-2900

Libraries Information Gateway | UW Home | FHL Home  
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Fig. 6 – Friday Harbor Library Online Help Links

The next web-based tool was the Friday Harbor Class Papers Index. The Friday Harbor Library has a collection of bound student papers dating from 1949. Most of the volumes do not have even a table of contents, and there was no indexing for the increasingly large collection, which meant the papers were becoming virtually inaccessible. The Index was created using a Microsoft Access database which was then converted to InMagic so it could be searched on the web with a user-friendly interface.

**Friday Harbor Class Papers Index**  
University of Washington Libraries

[About the Index](#)  
[Help](#)  
[Friday Harbor Library](#)  
[UW Libraries Catalog](#)  
[Friday Harbor Laboratories](#)

Keywords (searches Title, Class Name, Taxonomy, Location)  
AND  [Browse Terms](#)

Author  
AND  [Browse Terms](#)

Title  
AND  [Browse Terms](#)

Class Number  
AND  [Browse Terms](#)

Class Name  
AND  [Browse Terms](#)

Quarter  
AND  [Browse Terms](#)

Year  
AND  [Browse Terms](#)

Taxonomy  
AND  [Browse Terms](#)

Fig. 7 – Friday Harbor Library Class Papers Index

The index may be searched by many variables, including Keyword, Author, Title, and Taxonomy. Several of the fields have drop-down buttons to a thesaurus of “browse terms.” Entering all of the terms for the index was the work of a number of librarians and technicians over a two-year period. We currently add between five and ten volumes per year to the database.

Another tremendous advantage of the web is online access to the UW’s electronic journals collection. This has mitigated some of the pain of deep budget cuts to print materials. If totally reliant on print journals, the library would look stark indeed. However, as we cut print titles, we concurrently began to provide access to electronic journals so that now we have more germane titles available to the Friday Harbor Library than ever before.

While the idea of having easy electronic access to a universe of knowledge sounds desirable in the abstract, the actual transition has not always been an easy one. Researchers find that serendipitous browsing of the new journals often leads to new and unexpected research directions. There was therefore some concern that reliance on an electronic format would mean losing this opportunity for browsing. This, plus a casual comment by a researcher that he would find it useful to have a more visually oriented interface for electronic journals, sparked an idea for a “virtual reading room” for electronic journals.

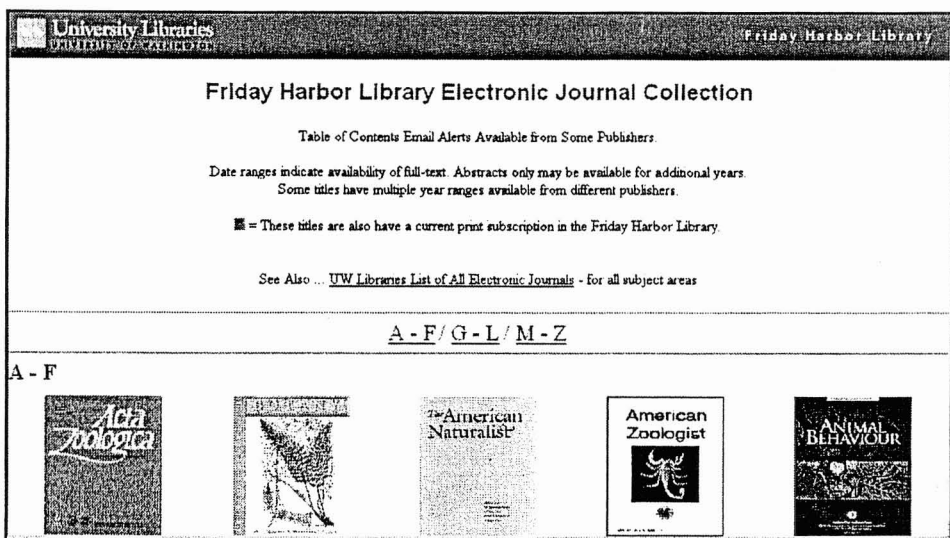


Fig. 8 – Friday Harbor Library Electronic Journal Collection.

The “virtual reading room” lists over 80 high-use e-journals. Only 35 of those titles are also current print subscriptions, thus clearly demonstrating how e-journal subscriptions have significantly improved access. The format of the “virtual reading room” is that of a display periodicals shelf. Graphics of the journal covers are linked to the electronic subscriptions. Links were also provided to those journals with SDI or table of contents services. The available date ranges are indicated, as well as whether the journal is currently available in print. All of this information is available through the online catalog, but not in this highly visual format. This type of hand-crafted page would be unmanageable with a larger collection, but works with a specialized audience and a limited number of journals.

### What’s Next?

The web has provided a way to deliver help, content, and resources to remote users in a way that could not have been predicted in 1952...or even in 1992. As our computing power grows, so do the possibilities. The Labs recently installed a wireless hub in the library for patrons using wireless modems. There has been some interest expressed in having online tutorials for those databases most used at the Labs. We also continue to explore the various possibilities of online delivery of resources.

As some things change, sometimes in dramatic ways, others stay the same. The Labs has been attracting researchers for almost 100 years. One of the reasons for this is the magnificent diversity of the San Juan Islands. Another was summed up in a 1930 description: “Life at the Station is simple and enjoyable. Strong reasons for this are the invigorating atmosphere and beautiful natural surroundings... It all inspires one with a



joy of life, a deep breathing of new vigor after the stench of cities and heated winter houses" (Murphy 1952).

So even as we reach out electronically to join our remote users to materials, let us hope that as long as there are scientists at the Labs, there will still always be a need for the "library by the sea." And as we began, let's end our tale--with words from Lawrence Murphy. "A library by the sea is necessary for lighting the ocean of darkness. No scientific research lives without library resources. In probing the unknown sea, libraries are especially important; the vastness of the subject impels one to grasp for all recorded knowledge." Luckily, for the scientists at the Friday Harbor Labs, there now exists the means to reach out to the almost unlimited resources of the electronic library universe. "Thus does the data of one scientist nourish the idea of another scientist, and thereby is our cloth of knowledge woven" (Murphy 1952).

### References

Murphy, Lawrence P. 1952. Library-by-the-Sea. *Wilson Library Bulletin* 27 (1952): 4, 318-320.

Phifer, Lyman D. and Phifer, Margaret W. 1930. The Puget Sound Biological Station. *The Biologist* 7 (1930): 1, 5-20.

